

MARTHA'S GIFT



Present to
Mrs J. E. Sudlam



Martha's Gift.—Frontispiece.



“No! I’ll make you a fort.”

p. 18

MARTHA'S GIFT.

A Story for the Freedchildren.

BY A TEACHER.

"In honour preferring one another."

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TO


THOSE AMONG THE FREEDCHILDREN
WHO ARE TRYING, EVERY DAY, TO GROW BETTER,

This Little Book

IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

MARTHA'S GIFT.

CHAPTER I.

FROM the door of a freedmen's school in one of the large towns of Alabama, one bright afternoon in October, the children were rushing in large numbers. Some moved along rapidly towards their homes, talking and laughing with their companions; others stopped to have a game in front of the school-house; while a few stood upon the steps, watching the merry players.

One little girl, however, was standing alone, close to the school-room door, with her books held in one hand, while with

the other she pushed the door a little open, as if she were waiting for some one. Her face was not so joyous as the rest; for it wore a sullen, angry look, and there were traces of tears on her cheeks.

She waited some time. Those who had stopped to play, gradually went on their way homeward; and three or four came out of the school-room, passing directly by the child. At last, tired of waiting, she sat down on the steps, with her elbow on her knee, and her face on her hand. She had not been seated there long before the door opened, and a gentle-looking lady, who seemed to be the teacher, came out, closing the door behind her. As she turned, after locking it, she saw the little figure on the steps.

“Martha,” said she, “is that you?”

“Yes, ma’am,” answered the girl, getting up from her seat upon the steps.

“What were you waiting for?”

“You, if you please, ma'am.”

“Well, I am here, now. Shall we walk along together?”

The girl did not answer; but, as her teacher proceeded on her way, she followed, keeping a little behind her in the path. She had taken off her sun-bonnet, and was swinging it by the strings as she walked.

“Martha,” said her teacher, pleasantly, “you do not seem so happy as usual. You are not still troubled about your book, are you?”

Martha stopped swinging her bonnet; but the sullen look deepened on her face as she said,—

“The book was mine, Miss Mason.”

“But could you not be generous enough to lend your book to Sarah, when you told me yourself that you knew your lesson?”

“She need not have gone and lost her book.”

“I know she did wrong,” answered Miss Mason, grieved at the selfish spirit which Martha was showing; “but you should have shown her how unselfish you could be, by giving it up to her cheerfully.”

Martha did not answer, but kept on moodily at her teacher's side.

Miss Mason, seeing that the girl was still angry, feeling that she had said enough on the subject, and wishing to cheer her, said,—

“Martha, did you know we were thinking of having a Christmas-tree for the school-children on Christmas-day?”

“No, ma'am: I did not know it,” answered Martha, brightening.

“It would be very pleasant: don't you think so?”

“Yes, ma'am.”

“Miss Mason,” she added, after a few minutes’ silence, “I wish I could make you a Christmas-present. If I had the money that some of the girls have, I would, too.”

“You can do that, if you wish, without money,” said Miss Mason.

“If I could know at Christmas-time, Martha,” she continued, “that you were no longer a selfish girl,—that you had learned to give up to others and to forget yourself,—that you were praying to Jesus to make you love him more and serve him better every day,—it would be the best Christmas-gift I ever had.” And the teacher looked down upon the girl’s face with a sweet smile.

“Would it indeed, Miss Mason?” she said, and then added, in a lower tone, “I’d like to try, so I would.”

“Nothing better than trying, Martha,” answered Miss Mason, as she stopped at

her own door. "Now good-night, and think over what I have said."

"Good-night," answered Martha, and turned on her way home alone.

She had still some distance to go: so she hurried along, for the sun was low and it would soon be dark. She thought of what Miss Mason had said, wondering whether such a gift as her own good behaviour would indeed please her teacher so much. She was still thinking of it when she reached the gate, and, stopping a moment, she leaned on the fence.

"Mammy," said her little brother Jack from the door, "here is Marthy."

"Tell her I want her this 'ere minute," answered a voice from within.

"I'm going to try it, anyway," said Martha to herself, as she swung the gate behind her and passed up to the cabin-door.

“Martha, you’re late, sure enough,” said her mother, as she came in. “Here is Tom been home half an hour.”

“I stopped to walk home with Miss Mason,” answered Martha.

“Well, put your book away now, and take this baby, while I cook the supper.”

Now, if there was any thing Martha disliked exceedingly, it was to hold the baby, especially when he was as cross and fretful as to-night. Usually she was apt to use a few cross words before she took him; but, as she went towards her mother, her new resolution came into her mind, and she reached her hands for him without a word.

“Marthy, Marthy, you are in my chair, my own chair, that I have had all the evening! Get up! get up!” And little hands pulled at the back of the chair in

which Martha had seated herself with her heavy burden.

“Can’t you let me have it a little while, Jack?” said she, controlling her wish to push him rudely away.

“No, no! I won’t! If you don’t get up right off, I’ll call mammy to you.”

“Marthy,” spoke up the mother, “you are always quarrelling with the children. Do give Jack the chair, if he wants it. I’d ought to have had supper ready for your pappy; but you stayed away so long that you kept me waiting.”

Martha got up, giving the chair a push towards her brother, saying, “There! take it; but I should think I was as tired as you, and the baby to hold besides.” And she passed out of the door in an angry mood.

As she walked up and down, with the baby in her arms, the tears fell in

great drops down her face, and the sobs which came between told how she had tried to do right and failed.

“I must be mighty bad,” she thought to herself, “if I cannot keep good-natured for five minutes. What an ugly temper! Why couldn’t I keep still, instead of speaking so! But, then, mother was cross, and Jack never behaves. I don’t believe Miss Mason herself could be good, if she had so many things against her.”

The cool air presently made her feel better: so, drying her eyes and striving to forget her trouble, she gave her whole attention to the care of the babe which she still held, and by the time her mother called her in to supper, the child was asleep, and she laid it down on its little bed before taking her seat at the table.

“Martha,” said Tom, her elder brother, between his bites of corn-bread, “you said

you were going to fight that girl after school. Why didn't you?"

"What girl?" demanded the mother.

"Sarah Williams," answered Tom. "She lost her own book, and then Miss Mason made Marthy lend hers to her."

"Those Williamses are a mean set," said her mother. "Did you fight, Marthy?"

"No, ma'am," answered Martha. "I thought about it, and I concluded that it would not be right and would not please Miss Mason: so I let her alone."

"Why wouldn't your teacher like it?"

"Because she tells us that we ought not to fight and quarrel and strike back."

"Not when somebody hits you?" said her mother.

"No: she says it is wrong."

"I wouldn't be beat by nobody, sure," again put in Mrs. Alson.

"I believe the girl is half right, and the

school-mistress too," said Mr. Alson, who had been listening to the conversation without making any remark. "It would save a heap of trouble if folks did not fight every one who 'posed on them."

"Lend me your spelling-book, Tom," said Martha, after they had gathered round the fire. "I left mine in the school-room."

"I can't," answered Tom. "I have my own lesson to study."

"But you are not studying now."

"Well, a'n't I going to right off?" Accordingly, the boy found his book, and began turning over the leaves.

"I do not know where it is, now," said he, after looking over the pages for some minutes: "here was Monday's lesson, and here is Tuesday's; but I'm sure I cannot tell where to-morrow's lesson is."

"Tom," said Jack, from his seat on the floor, "I'm building a fort."

“Call that a fort?” answered Tom, looking down with disdain upon the blocks which Jack had been arranging. “Ho! I’ll make you a fort.” And down went his book on the floor, and himself with it, while he proceeded to pile the blocks industriously.

“Now, Tom, lend me your book,” said Martha, after watching them a few minutes; and she leaned down and drew the book away from him.

Tom sprang up. “Give me the book, you ugly, hateful thing! How dare you take it?” And he snatched it from her, striking her with it as he did so.

Martha’s anger rose at this. Her eyes flashed, her lips quivered. She opened her mouth to answer his coarse words with others just as coarse, when suddenly a verse which Miss Mason had read that morning, and a half-thought of her good

resolution, came across her mind:—"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city."—Prov. xvi. 32.

The flash died from her eyes, and the quiver from her lips, and she took her seat in a corner of the room, without a word.

"Tom," said his father, sternly, taking his pipe from his mouth to give his remark more force, "get out of this room. You are a selfish boy; and until you can learn to behave, you need not show yourself here."

The boy looked at his father sullenly for a minute, but, not daring to disobey, took his spelling-book in his hand, and, giving his sister an angry look as he passed her, went out.

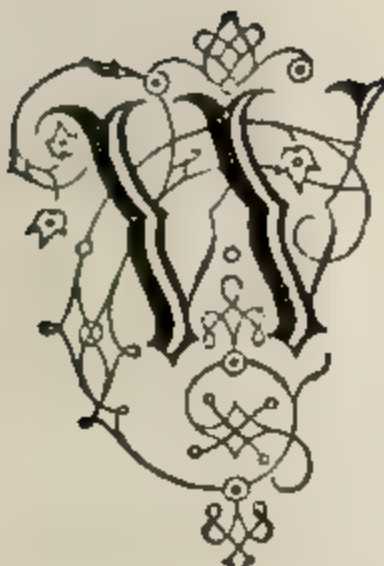
Mr. Alson put his pipe back into his mouth again, and smoked on in silence. Presently, however, he heard a sob from

the corner where Martha had seated herself. Her effort had been too much for her. Her father listened until he heard her sob again; and then, taking his pipe from his mouth again, he looked over towards her, and said, kindly,—

“Marthy, my girl, don't take on so. The school-mistress's rule works first-rate.”

This quieted Martha; and, with its kindly tones still sounding in her ear, she went to sleep with a clear conscience.

CHAPTER II.

A large, ornate, black and white decorative initial letter 'W' is positioned at the start of the first paragraph. It features intricate scrollwork, floral motifs, and a crown-like element at the top. The letter is stylized and serves as a visual anchor for the beginning of the chapter.

WHEN Martha woke, the next morning, her first thought was of the new resolve which she had made; and she fully resolved to do the best she could.

The morning passed away pleasantly in duties which she usually did at home; and when time came for school, she took her sun-bonnet from the nail on which it hung, and, with her book, started for the school-room, thinking of the afternoon recitation. She did not stop, as usual, on the steps to talk with her school-mates, but went directly in, with the hope of finding her speller and having a little time for study before the bell rang.

As she reached her desk, however, she stopped in utter dismay. There lay the Reader which she had so unwillingly lent to Sarah Williams the night before, torn and soiled, the cover stained, and the leaves broken and turned up at the edge. Martha's books were very dear to her; and, when she saw this one almost ruined, her heart failed her. She turned it over with her fingers for a few minutes in silence, and then, leaning her head upon the desk, burst into tears and sobbed pitifully.

Nothing roused her for some time; but at last there was a gentle hand laid on her shoulder, and a voice she knew, said,—

“Martha, what is all this?”

Martha quieted herself a little, and, without a word, pushed the book towards Miss Mason.

Miss Mason took it in her hand, and,

turning it over, with a word or two of surprise and displeasure, demanded,—

“Who did this, Martha?”

“I do not know, indeed, Miss Mason. I found it here when I came in,” answered Martha, sorrowfully, resting her head on her hand.

“Is Sarah Williams here?” said Miss Mason, turning to one of the scholars who was just coming in.

“Yes, ma’am,—in the street.”

“Go, then, and tell her I wish to see her immediately.”

“How came this book in this condition?” said the teacher, as Sarah appeared.

The girl pouted and hung her head, muttering something about her brother.

“Speak more plainly,” said Miss Mason.

“Tom said he would have none of Martha’s old, mean books around: so he threw it in the mud.”

“And what did you do then?”

“I told him I did not care how much he soiled it.”

“Go over to your seat,” said Miss Mason, sternly. “I had intended giving you a new book; but you will have to content yourself with this one; for I shall give Martha the new one which I intended for you.”

The girl obeyed, sullenly; and Miss Mason passed on to her desk, to ring the bell.

Martha's head ached, and her heart was sad; but she studied hard and recited perfectly, determined that the loss of her book should not be the means of her missing any one of her lessons. As Miss Mason dismissed her at night, she said,—

“Martha, I have no new Readers here, I find; but if you will come to me to-morrow afternoon, before school, I will give you the new one.”

She stepped away from the other scholars, and, keeping a long distance from Sarah, went rapidly on her way home. Suddenly, as she was thinking over the incidents of the afternoon, and remembering Sarah's disappointed face at the loss of the book, a new idea came into her mind.

Why not show her forgiveness and unselfishness by keeping the torn book herself and giving Sarah the new one? She had almost finished it, and was soon to be sent into a higher class. The old book would do very well for the little time which she would be obliged to use it. The idea was not at all agreeable. She walked fast, and tried to think of something else; but it would not do. The new proof of her resolution which she might now make kept constantly before her, and she questioned with herself what might be her duty in this case.

It so happened that that night and the

following morning she was kept very busy by her mother, and there was but one session held in the school which she attended, and that in the afternoon, so that until then she had not time for the thought which troubled her.

But no sooner had she taken her seat in the school-room, than the sight of Sarah's sullen face in the front seat brought it all back to her. She began to study, determined that for the present she would not think of it; but when the lessons were over and there was no duty calling her, the thought came back, and she set herself resolutely to decide what she should do in the matter.

It was a hard struggle. The school-room hum and buzz were lost to her ear: even the class in mental arithmetic, which she loved so well to hear recite, was forgotten. Miss Mason looked over towards

her seat, wondering at her stillness and thoughtful look; but none of that busy throng imagined what was going on in the girl's mind.

“Why should I not let the matter stand as Miss Mason had arranged it? The new book belonged justly to me, as Sarah had ruined mine so that it would be of very little further use. Yet Sarah was disappointed. I could see that in her face when Miss Mason told her of her punishment. What a loving act of forgiveness and unselfishness it would be if I could give up the book to her! and how pleased Miss Mason would be to think that I was really trying to be a good girl! But then,” she thought, again, “why should I? Sarah Williams has always quarrelled with me.” The new Readers, arranged on the shelves back of Miss Mason's desk, looked very tempting.

She had almost given it up, at last, when suddenly some of Miss Mason's words to her the day before, came darting into her mind. "If I could know you were learning to ask Jesus to make you love him more and serve him better every day." "Why not ask him now?" thought Martha. "He might help me to do right; for he always loved to help every one while he was on earth." The little hands were suddenly clasped beneath the desk, and, with eyes bent upon the floor, Martha asked if Jesus would teach her what was best in this matter, and enable her to give up the book if it were right to do so. She felt easier after that; and although her heart was sore at the thought of losing the book, yet she was determined now, when school closed, to tell Miss Mason her resolve.

The bell rung: there was a rattle and

clatter of books and slates, and gradually the school-room became still. Miss Mason made a few remarks about the want of order she had noticed, and then added, "For fear some of you may not be here, I will give notice that I wish the scholars to come together on Saturday afternoon, to practise some singing for the coming Christmas 'exhibition.'" A murmur went round the school-room, which Miss Mason silenced by a touch of the bell, and then added, "Miss Aldrich and I are also thinking of selecting some of the pupils to take part in dialogues, declamations, and other exercises; and we shall decide by Saturday whom to appoint, giving each one his or her part at that time: so it is important that you should all be here. Now we will sing our usual evening hymn, and then I will dismiss you."

Martha remained at her seat until the

scholars were dismissed, and, as the last row passed out, took her old book from her desk and went slowly up to Miss Mason. Even at that last moment it was hard.

“Well, Martha?” said Miss Mason, stopping her writing, as the girl stood before her. Then, suddenly remembering her promise, she said, “You have come for your book, I suppose.”

“Miss Mason,” said the girl, in a low voice, with her eyes fixed on the floor, “I thought I should not have to use my book a great while longer, as we are nearly through; and Sarah looked so sorry when you told her that she must keep this one, that I thought I would ask you to give her the new one, as you meant to at first, and I will keep this one.”

Miss Mason looked up quickly, in surprise and pleasure at the unexpected act

of forgiveness ; and she saw, as she looked, by the quiver of the lip and tightening of the hands, that it had been no easy thing for this girl to give up the new book and keep the old one. The pleasure deepened.

“ If you feel so, I am willing, certainly,” she said.

Just then Sarah Williams put her head into the door, to see if Miss Mason were still there, and then came in and walked up to the desk. The two who were there remained perfectly silent until she reached them.

“ Miss Mason, I’ve no Reader to study in,” she said, bluntly.

Miss Mason looked at them both a moment, mentally contrasting the two dark faces, and then, turning to Sarah, said, gravely, “ Your friend Martha has come to me since school, to ask me to do as I at

first intended,—give you the new book, and she will keep the one you soiled.”

Sarah's look went from teacher to school-mate, and back again, in silence and astonishment.

“And as Martha wishes it very much,” continued Miss Mason, “I have concluded to do so.” Accordingly, she rose, and, going to the row of shelves, selected a Reader, and, sitting down, wrote on the blank page, and, after she had finished, turned the book round, so that both the girls could see what she had written:—

Sarah Ann Williams,

From her Friend and School-Mate,

Martha Alson.

Martha's eyes grew dull with tears for a minute, and then she said, with a grateful look, “Thank you, Miss Mason.”

The girl who had received the peace-

offering was lost in astonishment as she took the book from Miss Mason's hand, gazing first at her, then at the book, and finally towards Martha, who was now watching her.

"What did you do it for?" she asked, suddenly.

"I thought you would like it," answered the quiet voice of her school-mate.

"Not for spite, then?" with another look, divided between Martha and the new book.

"Oh, no!" answered Martha, with a little smile.

It was evidently too much for her to understand. "Well, it's good, mighty good, of you," she said, at last, taking up her book with an emphatic shake of the head. "I would not do that for nobody!" And, bidding her teacher "good-evening," she passed out of the room.

"My dear girl," said Miss Mason, turn-

ing round and laying her hand on Martha's shoulder, "you have been brave and good. Did you find it hard to do this?"

"Yes, ma'am, I did," replied Martha, her lip quivering again.

"What made you decide at last to give it up?"

"I did as you said, Miss Mason. I asked Jesus to help me, and he did."

"So he always helps, Martha. God bless you, my child! you have begun the right way."

So it happened that Martha was very happy, as she passed out of the school-room into the open air again, with her old book in her hand.

"Martha, I've been waiting for you this long time," said a voice behind her.

She turned, and saw Laura Morton on the steps with her books.

"I wanted to talk with you about the

exhibition. Where were you? I waited a long time, sure enough."

"I've been talking with Miss Mason."

"Have you? Did she say any thing about the exhibition to you? Has she given you any part to learn?"

"No," said Martha: "we have not been talking about it at all."

"Well, don't you hope you shall have some part? I do so want to sing! and I'm one of the singers, Miss Mason says, you know,—and so are you. Would it not be nice if we could sing together?"

"Yes, it would," answered Martha, suddenly waking up to the subject, which, during other more painful thoughts, had slipped her mind. "But how do you know we shall have singing?"

"Why, of course. Who ever heard of a Christmas without singing?"

Martha's thoughts went back to the

Christmas-time on the old plantation, and the dancing and festivity which then prevailed.

“Do you remember the Christmas at home?” she said to her companion, who was skipping along, swinging her bag of books and humming a tune.

“Yes,” answered the girl, walking more slowly; “but this will be better than those times.”

Martha did not answer; and the two girls walked on in silence until, arriving at Mr. Alson's gate, they bade each other good-night.

As Martha sat in the door-way, after supper, holding the baby, who had gone to sleep in her arms, and watching the great gold-and-crimson clouds which were floating about where the sun had set, her thoughts reverted to the conversation with Laura, and she blessed God for the truly

happy Christmas that was coming. It was with a heart full of gratitude that she rose at last from her seat and went in to lay the baby in its accustomed bed.

“Marthy,” said Tom’s voice, from the fireplace, “can’t you help me a bit?”

“I don’t know, Tom. What’s the matter?”

“Why, my examples are those two, and these, and these,” (pointing to different portions of the page;) “but I’ve worked on these two last ones till I’m done tired, and I can’t get them, noway. You have been through them: try and see if you cannot get the right answer.”

Martha took slate and book, worked a few minutes, and then said, “Here, Tom; take this number for your divisor, and this for your dividend;” and so she made for the boy a full explanation of the troublesome problem.

Tom, who was not very patient, made several blunders, and forgot to multiply, two or three times ; but at last they were finished to his sister's satisfaction, and he turned to her with a sigh of relief.

“ You are real kind, Martha,” said he, earnestly. “ I was right stupid about those two. Thank you : no more,” as she offered further help. “ Father is waiting for you to read him a chapter.”

So Martha took the great Bible which Mr. Alson had brought away with him from their old home, where it used to be kept for the meetings of the coloured servants on the place, for the use of those who had learned to read, and, seating herself in a chair by the fire, where the light could shine on her book, read to her father of the angels' message to the shepherds, stopping occasionally to explain a passage as she had heard it from her teacher.


Presently, when she had finished, and had come back from the table where she placed the book, as she stood before the fire, looking down into the coals, she suddenly turned, and, kneeling down and putting her hand on her father's knee, said,—

“Father, would you have believed this two years ago?”

He understood her in a moment. “No, child; no,” he said. “You all learn very fast, sure enough, and talk real pretty. These is wonderful new times.”

“They are God's times,” said Martha, as her gaze went back to the fire; “and we must thank him for them.”

CHAPTER III.

OTHER," said Martha, on Saturday morning, looking up, with her face full of trouble, from a trunk over which she was bending, and speaking to her mother, who had just come into the room, "haven't I a clean white apron somewhere in this trunk?"

"What do you want of it?" said her mother, looking round at her.

"I want it to wear over to the school-house this afternoon: we are going to meet to practise for the exhibition, you know." And Martha pulled over the things in the trunk, in a renewed search.

"If it's anywhere, it's over in that

corner," said Mrs. Alson, pointing to a large white box in one corner of the room.

Martha left the trunk for the box, and began to search there; and the silence lasted some little time.

"Mother, look here!" said she, at length, in a voice of great consternation.

Her mother looked up, and saw the apron as Martha held it up. It had been laid smooth and clean into the box; but some one had been there, and, in turning over the clothing, had so soiled and tumbled the apron that it was unfit to wear.

"Tom was there," said her mother, coming up to her; "and, oh! what a fix he has left the things in!" she added, stooping to the box and beginning to restore order.

"He is a hateful, lazy, good-for-nothing boy, so he is!" said Martha, angrily; and,

throwing the apron back, she rose and went quickly out of the door, with hot, angry tears in her eyes and wrong thoughts in her heart. She sat down on the door-stone to get over it, tapping her foot impatiently on the ground, and thinking how Tom had troubled and vexed her.

She had not been sitting thus long, when Jack came towards her with a card in his hand, on which something was printed, which he was vainly trying to read.

“Marthy,” said he, not noticing her sullen look, but intent on his task, “look at this. Teacher gave it to me, and told me to learn it for next Sunday; but it’s all long words, and I cannot make it out.”

His sister, thus appealed to, brushed the tears out of her eyes, and looked down at the card:—

“For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.”

She started, and read it again. "There is a lesson for me," she thought: "come in just the right time, too." She read it over again and again, thinking how beautiful it was, yet how difficult. "'Your heavenly Father will also forgive you.' Surely," she thought, "after such a promise, I might be willing to do my part." And the tears gathered again.

"Read it, and tell me what it means," demanded Jack, pounding the knee on which his hand rested, to rouse her from her thoughts.

So she read it over again aloud, and then said, "It means, Jack, that when any one does wrong to you,—fights you, or calls you names, you know,—if you don't answer, but go away quietly and forget, then, when you are bad yourself, God will forgive you too."

Jack looked up into the earnest face of

his sister as she said this, and, seeing how grave her look was, and that her eyes were full of tears, said, comfortingly,—

“All right, Marthy : Jack will be good. Now teach it to me.”

It was impossible, saying over the comfort-speaking words to the child and hearing them repeated by his innocent lips, to be longer angry even when her brother Tom swung the gate open and came in. He stopped at the door to hear Jack repeat his text once or twice, and then went in.

Presently Martha heard her mother's voice, speaking in a loud, angry tone, from the box of clothes over which she was still bending, scolding the boy for leaving the articles in such confusion.

Tom answered with low mutterings at first, and then took refuge in sullen silence. At last she ceased, and he rose to leave the room.

“ You’ll get no good by going out there,” said his mother; “ for Martha is mad enough with you, and you will catch it from her for spoiling her apron.”

Consequently, the boy went by her with a sullen frown, and Martha, having heard what had passed, did not speak to him as he turned the corner of the house.

Martha sat still till she had taught Jack his verse, and then, sending him away, rose herself, and went round the house, in the direction which she had seen her brother take. She found him seated on an old box, leaning against the cabin.

She went up to him, and, putting her two hands on his shoulders, and leaning down, said, “ Tom, I’m not angry with you.”

“ I spoiled your apron,” answered Tom, sullenly.

“ I know you did, Tom, and I was

angry at first; but I do not need it particularly: so I do not want you to feel so badly about it."

"Come," she added, as the boy remained silent, sullenly breaking in bits the stick he held; "go with me to the school-room: it will be time in a few minutes."

"What's got into you, Martha?" said the boy, standing up and looking at her with a faint smile. "You did not use to get over things so quick."

"I'm only trying now, Tom," answered the earnest voice.

"Well, you are beginning well, anyway. And I believe, myself," he added, as he turned to go with her, "that you have been learning Jack's text. I only wish *I* could."

So the leaven began to work.

The school-room was crowded when Martha and her brother reached it, and

the children were singing. They continued this for an hour, practising many new tunes and hymns for the coming exhibition. After this was over, Miss Mason said she would dismiss them all, except a few whom she wished to remain, as she was intending to appoint for them separate songs and dialogues. She then read over the list of names which she held; and Martha was overjoyed to find her own name among them, and also that of her friend, Laura Morton.

The crowd of boys and girls passed out as they were dismissed, leaving about thirty in the room.

“Now, scholars,” said Miss Mason, “I will give to each of you your separate parts; and, when that is arranged, Miss Aldrich will hear a portion of them recited, and I will hear the remainder.” Accordingly, she began to appoint, and Martha

was again rejoiced as she found that she was to have a piece of poetry to recite.

Finally Miss Mason said, "I have one more here. It is a song to be sung by five girls, each one singing a solo, and the five uniting at the close in a chorus. I am a little uncertain whom to appoint."

Martha saw Laura's eyes brighten, and she felt anxious for herself.

"I believe," continued the teacher, looking round after a moment's hesitation,—“I believe these will answer: Maggie French, Jane Morris, Ellen Jenkins, Alice Elliot,”—and here she paused again,—“well, Martha Alson.”

Martha's heart beat with pleasure; but, looking at her friend, she saw how her face had fallen, and that she was very much disappointed.

“Oh,” she whispered to Martha, “I

wanted that so much ! and now I have only a little part in a dialogue."

Martha was about to answer, when the recitations commenced, and the two girls gave their whole attention.

It so happened that Martha's recitation was not called for until almost the last ; and she knew that the singing would come directly after. As she left her seat, she saw that Laura was preparing to go home, as she had finished her "little part : " so she stopped, and said, hurriedly,—

"Wait a few minutes, Laura : I want you particularly," she added, as the girl hesitated.

So Laura sat down again.

After the little poem was recited, and Martha was leaving the platform, Miss Mason said, "You need not leave the platform, Martha : your solo comes next."

Martha hesitated. "Miss Mason," she

said, in a low, hurried voice, "Laura Morton is a beautiful singer, and she is very anxious for that solo. She has only a little part in a dialogue, while I have a piece all to myself. May I not give up my part to her?" Her determination was a sudden one, and she felt now that it would be hard to give it up.

Miss Mason saw this, too. "Have you thought well of this, Martha?"

"Yes, ma'am,—at least, well enough; for Laura wants it."

That was enough for her. Laura wanted it; and it did not require much thought.

Miss Mason admired her as she stood there. "Well, you may have your wish," she said, with a smile; "and you may remain and listen to them, if you wish."

So, as the teacher called the class, she called Laura's name among them, but Martha's was omitted.

Laura started, and looked round at Martha, who motioned to her to go forward. She did so ; for there was no time to lose ; but she stopped at Miss Mason's chair.

"I do not belong to the number, Miss Mason," she said.

"Martha Alson has asked her part for you, as you wished it so much," said the teacher, turning round in the chair and looking at Laura.

She said nothing in answer, but her round eyes grew larger and rounder, and Miss Mason spoke to her again, before she moved to take her place in the class.

Martha stayed to hear them. Each girl took a separate part, and then they all sang in chorus ; and Laura performed her part as well as, if not better than, the rest. As her clear voice rang through the room, Martha was glad she had given up the part.

It was very pleasant, too, as she waited

for Laura, as the scholars passed out, to have the girl come up, and, putting her arms round her neck, thank her for her self-denial. "I am afraid I should not have been so good," added the grateful girl.

But it was not so pleasant, walking home alone, to think of that song and the part she might have had; and although she did not for one moment regret her action, yet the tears would come into her eyes, although she tried to keep them back.

It so happened that Martha's brother Tom had been among those to remain, and a declamation had been assigned to him. That night he sat a long time over the fire, doing nothing but gazing into the coals, while Martha sat on the other side, finishing her Sunday-school book by the light of the fire.

After a while he looked up and spoke.

“Marthy, did not Miss Mason give you a part in that last song this afternoon?”

Martha started a little, but, without raising her eyes from the book, answered, “Yes.”

“Well, you did not sing with the girls. Why was it?”

It was a plain question, and demanded an answer: yet Martha hesitated and hesitated.

“Say, what was the reason?” repeated her brother, again looking up at her hesitating face, on which the fire-light shone.

“Laura Morton took my place,” answered Martha, taking her eyes off the book and looking intently into the bed of fire on the hearth.

“Did Miss Mason leave you out, after all?”

“No: I gave up my part to Laura.”

“What for?”

“She wanted it,” replied Martha.

“Well, what of that? You have a better voice than she has.”

“Oh, Tom! did you hear her sing?” replied Martha, turning round eagerly. “And, besides, she wanted that part so much! I am glad I gave it to her.”

Tom glanced at her with his great black eyes, and then fell to gazing at the fire, which he did industriously for a long while; but at last he spoke again.

“I say, Marthy, it was hard for you to give it up: wasn't it?”

Martha looked at him for a moment, and then down at her book, and answered,—

“Yes; at first it was hard.”

“That was good of you, Marthy,” said Tom, gravely, after he had pondered well her reply. “You are better than I am: I could never have done that.”

“No, Tom,” replied Martha: “I am

not better; but I believe God is helping me to give up to others."

Tom said no more; but for days afterwards he treated his sister with a marked respect, such as he had never before shown her; and the incident was not forgotten. Long afterwards, he reminded her of this act of unselfishness, — the first he had known, — and told how it had influenced him.

The affair was not at an end here, however. Miss Mason, walking home after her day's labour, fell to thinking of Martha's self-denial in this matter, and in other instances which she had noticed in the child, of late. It occurred to her that perhaps she might find a sixth part in the song, which Martha could take. The more she thought of it, the more she wished it could be done. And, after an hour's patient labour that evening, the thing was

accomplished, and Martha, without knowing it, had a place in the song she had given up so willingly.

Another thing happened this same night. After Martha had said her evening prayers, and lay awake in the dark, musing over the events of the day, it struck her that she might, on the half-day in which there was no school, gather for sale enough iron by Christmas-time to buy Miss Mason a present.

This girl had forgotten, in her new anxiety to do right, that she had begun with a desire of pleasing her teacher and of giving her a gift in this way. She had now learned to look much higher than this..

This new idea of the present remained fixed in Martha's mind: so she came in the next morning, after feeding the chickens, and, standing before the fire, with her

hands crossed in front of her, she began to talk with her mother.

“Mammy,” said she, “would you mind if I should go out mornings, after the work is done, and gather iron to sell?”

Mrs. Alson stopped her sweeping, and looked at Martha. She remembered how, not long ago, when she had suggested this same thing as a morning occupation, it had been treated with scorn, and the girl had felt above doing it. And now she had offered of her own accord. Martha had surprised her mother several times lately, and she was surprised now.

“I don’t care, I’m sure,” she replied. “But what put that into your head?”

“Why,” answered Martha, nervously changing her hands backwards and forwards, “I thought I might get enough money, perhaps, by Christmas, to buy Miss Mason something, — some little thing;

and I would like to, so much, if I could." And the hands came back to their old position, and were folded before her.


"Well, I'm sure I don't care," replied Mrs. Alson; "but you must not expect to earn much. Money doesn't come so easy."

"No, I know it; but I'll try to get a little." And Martha sat down to her book, very much relieved.

So she began immediately to collect iron. As soon as the work was finished at home in the morning, she would take her basket and start out.

It was very tiresome work: yet she was not discouraged, and scarcely ever came home without a good quantity in her basket. Often, when she took her seat in the school-room, her head throbbed and ached with the morning's exertion; but her lessons were never neglected in consequence, nor a day missed from the school-room.

CHAPTER IV.



ON Friday afternoon of the week following the Saturday meeting at the school-room, just at the close of school, Miss Mason told the pupils that she should expect them to meet the next day, to practise. She was passing Martha's desk as she said this; and she stopped there, and said to her, "I would like to see you after school, if you will wait."

Martha wondered what Miss Mason could want with her; but she waited until the scholars had all gone, and Miss Mason was at liberty, before she left her seat and went up to the desk.

"Martha," said Miss Mason, who was

standing at her desk, busily gathering up the papers which were spread over it, "I have found you a place in the song, after all. I discovered I could arrange it for six voices: so I made room for you; and, if there is time to-night, I would like you to step round to the house with me and sing over your part a few times."

How Martha's heart leaped! In the song, after all! "Oh, Miss Mason," she said, in an excited voice, "I am so glad! Oh, I am so glad! I wanted a part in it so very much!"

Miss Mason smiled. "Well, you are in it now," she said, rising. "Come, we must hurry, or we will not have time before dark."

So Martha followed her teacher, where she sang over her part three or four times; and, as Miss Mason heard her rich, powerful voice, she was heartily glad that she

had concluded to place her with the other five.

Martha, proud and happy, ran through the twilight to her home. As she came up, Tom stood leaning over the gate.

“Oh, Tom,” she said, out of breath, but not pausing, in her haste, “Miss Mason has given me a part in the song with the rest of the girls, after all. Isn't it splendid?”

“Why, yes, Marthy; I'm glad, I'm sure. But where have you been so long? Mother is angry enough, and vows she will not give you any supper.”

“Oh, dear! Is it so late? Miss Mason kept me to sing the song over.” And she hurried up to the door.

She told her news, when she first went in, to her mother, who was bending over the fire, and to her father, who was just finishing his supper; and the mother, when she saw the bright young face and eager

eyes, and heard that she was to sing, felt so proud of her that she could not find it in her heart to scold the child for being late.

She only said, "Well, I'm sure I'm mighty glad for you, if it suits you so well. And now sit right down and eat your supper; for it's late enough."

"How much iron have you, Marthy?" demanded her father, as she seated herself on the opposite side of the table.

"Oh, I've a nice lot," she replied; and, springing up, she brought to him a box from the shelf, and, opening it, showed him the contents.

"Well, you have done finely," said he, turning the bits of iron over with his fingers. "You must have full twenty-five cents' worth there. You will be getting rich soon," he added, giving her back the box, and rising.

Martha laughed, put her box away, and sat down to her supper with a light heart.

She was very tired, the next afternoon, as she took her place in the school-room, which was fast filling with scholars. She had been out all the morning, looking for iron; she had had a long walk, and her head ached from stooping so much; but she enjoyed the afternoon exercises, especially her own part in the song at the close, and Laura's surprised, pleased look as she took her place among the singers.

"If you please, Miss Mason," she said, coming up to her teacher after the scholars had passed from the school-room, and reaching out her Testament, "will you give me a text for Sunday-school to-morrow?"

Miss Mason took the book, and, turning over the leaves, handed it back to Martha with her finger on the verse.

“There it is,” said she: “I mean, just what you have been trying to do lately.”

Martha took the book, and read, “In honour preferring one another.” She had no need to study it; for the words repeated themselves over and over in her mind, as she walked homewards.

“To prefer means to like one person more than another: I know that,” she said to herself, glancing at the verse; “and I think ‘preferring one another’ must mean to do things for other people before you do them for yourself. I wonder if I have really been doing that? Then, ‘in honour:’ what can that mean?” She was obliged to think a while before she could conclude; but at last she said, slowly, and half aloud, “It must mean out of love and respect for the people for whom you do the kindness, and your own feeling that it is your duty

to do it. I'll ask Miss Mason ; but I think that must be the meaning."

Just at this point, Martha's eye was caught by something which she saw in a store-window by which she was passing. It was a plain, open willow basket,—just the right size, Martha thought, stopping at the window and looking at it, to hold Miss Mason's sewing-work. It was quite small and plain, and Martha thought perhaps it might come within her means. After looking at it for some time in great doubt, she at last timidly opened the door of the store and went in and asked the price.

"Half a dollar," was the reply, with an amazed look at the little coloured girl who had come to ask the price of baskets.

Martha thanked him, and came away. Half a dollar ! She could soon earn that. It yet lacked a month of Christmas ; and

her father had said she had full twenty-five cents' worth already. On Monday she would go and sell what she had; and accordingly on Monday she did so, and took her twenty-five cents joyfully home, putting it away safely in her little trunk.

Tuesday and Wednesday passed without incident. On Thursday night, however, when Martha came home, she saw, when she entered the door, that something was wrong in the household. Tom sat over the fire, with his elbows on his knees and his face in his hands, and looking very much disturbed; and her mother was putting things on the table in a quick, hard way, which showed that there was trouble brewing. Martha, therefore, came in quietly, and as quietly hung up her hood and shawl in their places, and went to the fire to warm her hands.

There was nothing said for several

minutes, until the mother broke the silence, saying,—

“Marthy, why don't you move? Take that corn-bread off the fire, and put it on the table. Here's pappy come home, and supper not ready.”

Martha obeyed quickly, and busied herself about the table until the supper was ready.

“Come, Tom,” she said, as she sat down; “come to supper.”

“I don't want any,” answered Tom, sullenly.

“Tom thinks corn-bread and bacon are not good enough for him: he wondered why we did not have something more and better,” said Mrs. Alson.

“He will have to go to a richer house than this, then,” answered his father. “Corn-bread and bacon are good enough for me.”

“Tom,” said Martha, after there had been a few minutes’ silence, “supper tastes very good: had you not better have some?”

“I wish you would attend to your own affairs,” answered Tom, angrily. “Didn’t I tell you once that I did not want any?”

Martha had been used to such things from him, of old; but she had not heard them of late, and the angry words pained her.

Her father looked to see how she would take it; and, noticing that she was still, but with a grieved look which he did not like to see, he did battle for her.

“If you cannot speak more decently than that to your sister, you had better not stay here. A decent question should have a decent answer.”

Tom moved uneasily in his chair, but did not answer.

Martha wondered in her own mind what had come over Tom. He had not been so sullen in a long time; and she suddenly remembered that he had been spoken to two or three times in school that afternoon for noisy behaviour; and she wondered if his present mood had any thing to do with it. There was nothing more said to him; and, after the supper was over, Mr. Alson went away into the town to buy some meal, and Martha and her mother proceeded to clear away the remains of the supper.

Presently Mrs. Alson went to replenish the fire, which had burnt low. Tom sat directly in front of it.

“Tom, move away: don't you see I want to come and fix the fire?” she said.

Tom never stirred.

Mrs. Alson's anger rose. “Tom,” she said, “get out of that seat this instant,

and go away,—anywhere out of my sight; for you are a bad boy.”

“Driven out of my own home, I declare!” said the boy, rising from his seat and kicking over the chair in which he sat, and going out of the house.

Mrs. Alson said no more, but mended the fire, and, telling Martha she was obliged to carry home some washing that she had been doing, left her with her little brother and the sleeping baby in charge, and went away.

Martha took Jack up in her lap and sat down by the fire. Her low hymns soon soothed the little, tired boy to sleep; and she laid him on the bed and returned to her seat again, thinking over Tom's conduct and wondering as to the cause of it. He had been so good, of late, and had seemed to be trying so hard to govern his temper, that this sudden fit of anger had

astonished her very much. She ended her anxious thoughts with a prayer for him,—Martha had learned to pray, in these days,—and then, building up the fire anew, she found her book and began to study. She had been engaged thus only a few minutes when she heard a step at the door, and, looking round, saw Tom standing in the door-way.

“Come in, Tom,” she said, cheerfully. “I’ve a mighty nice fire here, and it’s quite cool to-night. Come and get warm.”

Tom came in, drew a chair along and sat down by the fire, shivering with the cold.

“Why, Tom, how cold you are!” said Martha.

“I wonder you speak to me again,” replied Tom, slowly.

“We’ll forget all about that,” answered his sister, coaxingly.

“I hope you will, I’m sure, Martha. But I will tell you what was the matter with me to-night: I am going to be sick,—real sick. I feel it all through me,—aches and darting pains; and my head throbs and beats so. It was not that I did not like the supper; but, feeling so sick, I could not look at any thing to eat and feel as if I wanted it. What shall I do if I am sick, Martha? losing school and the exhibition, and so near Christmas, too!” And Tom burst into tears, leaning his head upon his hands.

“Why, Tom,” said Martha, very much shocked and grieved by what he said, “why did you not tell us before?”

“I don’t know,” answered the boy, sobbing, “I’m sure.”

Martha wished heartily that her mother was at home. She did the best thing she could think of,—found something cooling

and bound it on his head, and then began to talk to him cheerfully, in a low voice, just enough to keep his mind from the disagreeable things of which she knew he would be thinking if he were left to himself. Her heart ached the while as she saw how her brother was suffering, and she listened intently for her mother's step, and, when it came, sprang to meet her.

"Oh, mother," she said, in a troubled voice, lowered so that Tom might not hear, "Tom has come in, and he is so sick!"

"Serves him right for his bad conduct!" answered the mother, throwing aside her bonnet.

"But, mother, he is so very sick!" And Martha burst into tears and sobbed in a nervous way, which showed how intense her anxiety had been for her brother.

Her mother, frightened by the girl's

manner, went up to Tom, and found him a very sick boy.

Nor was he any better the next morning; and Martha knew that for at least that day she could not be spared to gather iron. A shade of regret clouded her spirits at first; but she soon drove it away, and strove to be willing to give up her own pleasure and stay at home to wait upon her brother. Tom was not fretful to-day: he lay quite still, keeping his eyes shut most of the time. Once or twice, however, as Martha passed him, she saw his eyes fastened upon her; and at last, going to him, she asked him if he wished for any thing.

“Are you not going out this morning for your iron?” said he.

“No, not this morning.”

“Why not?”

“I am going to stay and nurse you a while.”

“I’m so sorry, Marthy, that you have to stay at home and take care of me,” said Tom, turning his head wearily on the pillow.

“But I like to take care of you, Tom,” answered Martha, laying her cool hand on his head.

“Do you, really?” said he, his keen eyes bent upon her face with his old look of searching earnestness.

“Why, Tom, certainly I love to take care of my brother.”

Tom’s eyes filled with tears: he tried to speak, but failed, and turned his head away again.

Meanwhile, the mother had taken her wash-tub outside the house, cold and chilly as it was, and was washing there, so that she might speak to the doctor when he passed: so, when she did see him, she brought him into the house, wiping her

hands on her apron, and telling him how "ill her poor boy was."

The doctor rubbed his hands together, looked at the boy, felt his pulse, and sat down in a chair which Martha placed for him at the bedside.

He asked Tom a number of questions, and then, with a glance round the room, said, "How will you fancy being sick here some time?"

"I will try and bear it, sir," answered the boy, his lip quivering as he spoke.

"You will have to try your best; for I fear you will be sick some weeks," he answered, and then turned to Mrs. Alson and gave to her the necessary directions with regard to medicine, adding, "You must try and keep it as quiet as possible here."

Martha left her place at the head of the bed, and, going round to Jack, who was

pounding nuts upon the floor, stopped his play and led him back with her.

“Is this your sister?” demanded the doctor, after a moment’s survey of Martha’s bright, intelligent face.

“Yes, sir,” answered Tom, smiling a little.

“Are you a good sister?” asked the doctor of her, seeing Tom’s smile.

But the boy did not give her time to answer, but replied for her,—

“She is one of the best kind of sisters, sir.”

“She will have an opportunity to prove what you say while you are ill,” said the doctor, smiling at the affectionate look exchanged between the brother and sister.

“I will try, sir,” answered Martha, gravely.

CHAPTER V.

IT proved a task indeed for Martha, in the weeks which followed. Her strength of body and of mind was sorely taxed. She had very little time which she could call her own. She saw, by the experience of the first day, what a task awaited her. Tom was very little trouble to-day; but with Jack it was another thing. He could not understand why he should be made to keep quiet, and she tried to amuse him in a quiet way; but she found that the hymns and Bible-stories which satisfied the tired little boy at night did not suit the wide-awake boy now; and when she had tried every thing of which she could think, and all had failed, she went

to her mother, who was washing outside, and asked her if it was too cold for Jack to play out, for she could not keep him still in the house, and his noise troubled Tom.

Mrs. Alson thought it might content him for a while, if he were well wrapped up: so Martha tied on his little hood and put on his mittens and sent him out. It was all he wanted; and he gave Martha no more trouble.

Just before noon, Mrs. Alson came in; and, as she began to prepare the dinner, she said to Martha,—

“I’ve finished washing for to-day: so, if you wish to go to school this afternoon, you can do so; for I can take care of Tom, and Jack will be in school: so you will not be needed.”

Martha stood thoughtfully by the door, uncertain what to do about it; but, just as

she was about to tell her mother that she was willing to remain at home, Tom called her, and she hastened to him.

“Martha,” said he, “I’d much rather you would go. It would trouble me, rather than do me good, to have you stay from school.”

So Martha, seeing that she could be well spared, reminded her mother of the doctor’s charge, and hurried off to school. She had feared this privilege would be denied her; and she felt very thankful that she was able to attend school, notwithstanding that she was obliged to use the few minutes before the bell rung, which were usually so pleasant for a little chat, in eagerly studying over the lessons for the afternoon. Nor did she stop a moment after school was dismissed, but hurried homewards, and was gladly welcomed by her mother, who was happy to be relieved for a while,

and by Tom, who had been listening for her step for the last half-hour.

Tom was too ill to bear much talking: so Martha only looked at him a moment, and then went out to quiet Jack, who was just coming in from school, shouting at the top of his voice. It was less trouble to keep him quiet now, for he was tired: so, after supper, Martha left him to her mother, and, putting her shawl around her, went out into the twilight to rest herself a little. She wanted to think, too, and to see clearly the direction things were taking. Tom was very ill, — that was plain; and that she must help to take care of him was also plain; and so she must lose her mornings' work of gathering iron, her money, and abandon the idea of Miss Mason's present. This had been Martha's pet idea; and now she must give it up! It was hard, but it was her duty; and although

two or three tears would come in consequence, they were only two or three. She had rather do her duty to her brother; and she must grow willing to give up the basket, and think only of the best means of rendering Tom easy and comfortable during his illness. So she thought of him and of her duty, there, until she felt better; and, the cool air having refreshed her, she went back into the house, ready and willing for the task assigned her.

It proved a task indeed. Tom continued very ill for weeks afterwards; and, as Mrs. Alson was obliged to work, it left Martha with the care of him; and although her mother would come in from time to time from her washing or ironing to relieve her, yet Martha had very little time to call her own. When her mother was with Tom, there was something always for Martha to do,—house-work, or carrying home work

for her mother, and, oftener, the care of Jack or the baby. But Tom preferred her company, and was only satisfied when she was by. Often he was wayward and perverse; but she was always gentle with him, bearing all his ill humours, knowing them to be only the result of illness.

The daily joy of both brother and sister was the doctor's visit. When Martha's tired face greeted him, he had always a cheerful word for her, and, when Tom could bear it, often an amusing story for both; and sometimes he would take out his little pocket-Bible and read to them, and then talk with them of their duty to each other and to those around them. He soon understood what a desire these two had to do right; and, seeing what an influence their example might have in the household, he counselled them wisely, satisfied, by the attentive faces with which

they listened, that his advice would be remembered and acted upon; and so it came to pass that the children looked for the doctor's visit as the bit of sunshine which enlivened those days of suffering.

Martha was kept at school. Her mother always found a way to take her place in the afternoon; and, although Martha frequently offered to stay at home, her mother, knowing how much she loved her school, would always declare she did not need her. The scholars remained now almost every day to practise for the coming exhibition; and some were counting the weeks, and even the days, till it should come. Although Martha enjoyed these meetings very much, and was always present, she never said any thing in regard to them at home; for she knew it would make Tom feel badly, as he was to have had a part in the performance.

Tom's fever continued for two weeks; and, when it abated, it left him very weak. He had been dull and silent; now, as his strength returned, he was restless and anxious to have some one always near him. He would often try very hard to be quiet; but the nervous state in which he was made him so restless that it was almost impossible for him to keep still.

Martha would sit and talk or read to him by the hour; and when she came in from school she was always sure of a welcome from him, and, hanging up her hood and shawl, she would sit down and tell him of all the occurrences of the afternoon. She always listened to the recitations of his classes, and was able to tell him how they advanced.

One afternoon, just as she had finished talking, and had risen from her chair to go and help her mother, Tom stopped her.

“Martha,” said he, “are the school-hours changed, that you are not able to come home earlier?”

“No,” answered Martha.

“Then what brings you so late every night?”

Martha felt that she must tell him. “We stay every afternoon, now, after school, to practise for the exhibition,” she said, gently.

“Yes,” said Jack, jumping up from his chair, and coming eagerly towards Tom; “and Marthy let me stay yesterday, and I heard them all speak. Marthy can say all her piece, and sings,—oh, so beautifully!”

Tom looked first at Martha, and then at Jack, on whose head Martha's hand was resting. He looked very grave for a minute, and then, seeing Martha's troubled look, smiled, and said,—

“Martha, mother is calling you : Jacky is going to stay and tell me what the scholars said.”

Martha went away with a secret gladness at her heart, and a wonder that Tom had been able to bear it so well.

Jack sat down, very content to go over the proceedings of the day before ; and the sick boy lay and thought it over, feeling sure now that he should lose his part ; and he struggled to bear the disappointment.

After Jack went away, and the family had gathered for supper, there were tears shed which the family knew not of ; and then there was a prayer — an earnest prayer — sent up, that God would help him bear his trouble.

So it happened that when Martha came to him, after the work was done, with her Sunday-school book and little Bible, to read to him, he asked her, quietly, to

put them aside for a while and tell him something about their practice for the exhibition, there being some things which Jack did not know.

So she answered all his questions, and told him of the progress they had made. "It is time we were ready," added Martha, hesitatingly.

"Yes," answered Tom; and after a little he added, "Martha, it was pretty hard to give it all up."

"Then he understands that he will have to give up his part," thought Martha; but she only said, "You have borne it well, Tom."

"I am trying to bear it. I know it seems a little thing; but my heart was so set upon it; and I never should have borne it patiently, Martha, if I had not had your example of unselfishness always before me."

It makes people feel very humble, sometimes, when they find they have been doing some great good of which they were not aware. It was so with Martha. She opened the book, and began to read, with a devout feeling of thankfulness that she had been able to do good ; and at the same time she wished she could always be a living example of holiness and unselfishness ; but she felt that she was still far from this.

She could choose no other verses for the evening Bible-reading than St. John's beautiful words respecting the love " the Father hath bestowed upon us ;" and she read them in such a gentle, touching tone that Tom felt how true and how real they must seem to her.

His " good-night, Martha," was followed by, " and thank you very much."

It had been a mild, warm day, and was

now a bright moonlight night; and as Martha looked out and saw how pleasant it was, she resolved to take a walk, partly for the pleasure of it, and partly on account of a headache which staying in the close, warm rooms had given her. So she took her shawl, and, putting it over her head, went out into the night.

It was very still. The moon shone down upon the little village of cabins, lighting up each one with its own pure light.

Martha stopped at the gate, to listen if there were any noises abroad. The distant barking of a dog, and the sound of voices in a cabin near her,—these were all. She stood a moment enjoying the silence, and then passed out into the road. She began repeating, as she walked along, the piece of poetry she was learning for the exhibition; and from that her thoughts wandered

to the afternoon's exercises, and to Tom and his readiness to hear Jack's story, and his after-remarks to herself. How sorry she felt that he would not be able to perform his part! He would probably be well, as he was getting so strong; but it would be too late then for him to learn. Why should she not ask Miss Mason to let Tom have his declamation to learn, or for her to teach him? Miss Mason had not given any of her pupils their pieces to learn for themselves, but had required them to recite them to her until they were perfect. Would she make Tom an exception? Would she do for him what she had not done for the others? Martha wondered whether she should find the courage to ask her.

Miss Mason knew that Tom had been very ill: indeed, she had been to visit him within a few days. She might be willing;

but Martha disliked exceedingly to ask. She almost forgot the beautiful evening, so much was she absorbed, and walked on very fast. She was on her homeward way now, and she thought it over many times before she reached the gate. "At any rate, I will say nothing to Tom about it," she thought, as she opened the door; and not a word did Tom hear.

The first thing Martha thought of, when she awoke, was the favour she was to ask of Miss Mason. It seemed a great thing to ask, as their teacher had so often told them that the scholars could not be allowed to learn their pieces by themselves. But Martha was determined to try at recess; and, having decided thus, she sprang up, and, looking out, found it was raining hard.

When she came out into the main room, she found Tom looking very dull and low-

spirited, Jack crying, and her mother baking cakes, which filled the room with smoke: so she went immediately and opened the door, and was ordered by her mother to close it, as Tom would take cold.

But by showing how she could pin a blanket up, so as to shield him from the cold, and telling her how badly the smoke was making him feel, the door was left open until the smoke had disappeared and let fresh air take its place,—which was all Martha wanted.

Her mother tried to persuade her to remain from school on account of the storm; but Martha pleaded so hard, that her mother at last consented, and she set off, feeling as though she had a difficult task before her. Her thoughts were so full of what she was intending to ask for her brother, that she entirely forgot when

Tom's classes recited, and so had no report for him.

“Well, Martha,” said Miss Mason, “what do you wish?”

The scholars had been noisy and restless that afternoon, and the teacher looked worried and tired.

“Miss Mason, brother Tom is getting right smart again, and will be well before Christmas. He is very much disappointed about losing his declamation; and I thought I would ask you if I might not take it home and teach it to him. I listened every time he recited it before he was taken sick; and I should like to try, very much.”

Miss Mason looked thoughtful; and then, a loud noise in the hall disturbing her, she rose hastily, with the bell in her hand, saying, as she did so,—

“No, Martha. You have heard me

say, a great many times, that I could not allow any thing for the exhibition to be learned at home. Tom will have to lose it."

She ended by stepping off the platform and ringing the bell; and Martha, just ready to cry, and feeling as disappointed as Tom would have felt had he known it, walked back to her seat.

So thoroughly had this girl learned to prefer others before herself!

It was with difficulty that she could pay the proper attention to the remaining lessons of the afternoon; but she tried hard to forget it, and to listen to Tom's class when it recited again, in order that she might have something to tell Tom; and she had hoped to have such good news for him! She put her books away a few minutes before Miss Mason rang the bell, and, as she sat there without any thing to

occupy her mind, her thought flew to the sick brother at home, and her wish to do a kindness for him.

She did not look up when the bell rang; out, as she raised her eyes a few minutes after, she saw Miss Mason looking at her thoughtfully; but, meeting Martha's look, she turned away.

The scholars who were preparing for the exhibition remained after the rest, and went through with their usual practice. They were then dismissed, and Martha was just passing out of the school-room, when her teacher called her, and, as she turned back, she saw Miss Mason looking over the books which covered the table.

“I have been thinking, Martha, of your request this afternoon,” she said, as Martha came up; “and I have concluded Tom's declamation will be safe in your hands,—

provided," she added, "you can read it yourself well enough to teach him."

Martha's heart beat. How rejoiced she was that she had listened so closely to the recitation while Tom had been at school!

"You are quite sure," said Miss Mason, turning over the leaves of the book, "that Tom will be well enough by Christmas day?"

"Oh, yes!" replied Martha: "he is gaining now, very fast."

"Ah, here it is. There: take this book and read this piece. Go down the room about half-way, so that I can hear whether you speak distinctly."

Martha trembled very much; but, remembering that she must do her very best, she forgot her fear, and began the recital.

"Very well done," was Miss Mason's comment. "You have made the most of

what came in your way. You may take it home and teach it to Tom,—a little at a time.”

Martha's thanks were very quietly but earnestly given; and her happy eyes told as much for her gratitude as her words.

“One would suppose,” thought the teacher, “that I had given her a great gift, instead of a hard task.”

As soon as Martha arrived at home, she found her mother very much hurried, and needing her immediately to go to the spring for water and help get the supper ready, as she had ironing that she must finish.

Tom was sitting in a great chair by the fire, with his head on a pillow; and his face, which had brightened as Martha came in, fell as he found she could not be spared to talk with him. He did not speak, however, but waited patiently until she should be at leisure.

Martha saw this: so, when she carried him the gruel, which she had been heating for his supper, she said,—

“I have something to tell you after supper, Tom; and you must try and think what it is.”

Tom roused up, and Martha went back to her work.

After supper, Mrs. Alson set out to carry her washing home, and Mr. Alson—or Uncle Ben, as he was called by the children—drew up his chair by the fire, and Martha went over and sat down by her brother.

“What have you to tell me, Martha?” said he.

“What do you think?” answered Martha, giving him a bright look.

“I don’t know, I’m sure. I’ve tried to think.”

Martha opened the book Miss Mason

had given her, and, finding the place, put the book into Tom's hands.

"Martha," said he, joyously, "where did you get it?"

"Miss Mason gave it to me, that I may teach you the piece for the exhibition."

Tom uttered an exclamation of surprise and delight. "How did you get it?" said he.

"I asked Miss Mason. I intended doing so last night."

"And was that the reason you were so determined to go to school to-day?"

Martha nodded.

"What a dear, good sister you are!" said Tom, gratefully, laying his hand upon hers, which was resting on the arm of his chair.

There was silence for a few minutes, and then Tom began again, suddenly.

"It will be a great amount of trouble for you to teach me, Marthy."


“Oh, no! it will not, indeed,” replied his sister, catching up the book; “you will be sure to learn it so quickly that it will be no trouble at all. I will give you a few lines now, if you are strong enough.”

So the lesson began, — one of many, which were learned by the patient perseverance of the teacher and the anxiety of the pupil to commit his part perfectly. Every evening after supper they would go over and over it; and Uncle Ben, who became very much interested, would seat himself with his pipe, when the lesson commenced, and listen with unabated interest to the close. Occasionally, when Martha was not quite certain of a part, she would carry the book to Miss Mason and read it over to her; and when she was tired or discouraged, her teacher's smile and word of praise would help her more than any thing else. Tom was not blind

to the task his sister had taken upon herself; and he tried to be patient and do every thing in his power to further her efforts.

These days were so busy that Martha had very little time to herself; and it was only when she passed the store where the basket was for sale that she felt every night the old wish come back. She always stopped and looked in at the window; and often, when she turned away, her face had sobered a little. Nevertheless, she was a happy girl, simply because she made those around her so happy.

CHAPTER VI.

HE time drew near for the exhibition. Tom was well a week before, and able to practise in the school-room. And, although he enjoyed speaking his piece, which he now knew perfectly, the greatest pleasure of the Saturday afternoon before the exhibition was the praise he heard given to his sister for the pains she had taken to teach him.

“You have done admirably, Martha,” said Miss Mason. “Tom speaks well, and shows he has had thorough teaching. I expect you will make a teacher yourself, some day.”

“And, Martha,” said Tom, as he and Martha sat by the fire that night, talking

over the events of the afternoon, "you have taught me more than this declamation, while I have been sick. You have shown me how we can make those around us happy by kindness and love and a willingness to give up our own pleasure for the sake of others. That chapter which you like so much and read so often has in it one verse, 'In honour preferring one another,' which I think you must have close to your heart."

Martha did not answer, for her eyes were dim, and her lip trembled; but she opened her Bible, and, pointing to a verse, handed it to Tom.

He stooped, so as to let the fire-light fall upon the book, and read,—

"It is God who worketh in you to will and to do of his good pleasure."

"I know it, Martha," said he, soberly; "and I believe he is teaching me."

The next morning, as they sat at breakfast, Tom said to his sister,—

“Were you not going to give Miss Mason a Christmas-present?”

“I was intending to; but I gave it up,” she answered.

“Why was that?”

“I had not collected money enough before you were taken ill.”

“What were you going to buy?”

“There was a basket which I saw in town, which I thought she might like to hold her sewing-work.”

“What was the price?”

“Fifty cents,” answered Martha, wondering why Tom was so suddenly interested in her gift.

There was no more said; and Martha had forgotten all about it, when Tom came to her, after breakfast, and put twenty-five cents into her hand.

“What is this for, Tom?” she said.

“To go with the other twenty-five,” he answered. “I have had it a long time. I earned it in the summer.”

“But, Tom,” said Martha, stopping him as he was going out, “I do not want to take your money.”

He turned round to her with a look and a smile, and then said,—

“Let me give you this, Martha, for your kindness to me.”

“You are too generous, Tom,” was all Martha could say; for her voice was choked.

So, instead of stopping at the door of the store, that afternoon, Martha went in and asked for the basket. The store-keeper had noticed the girl as she stopped every afternoon to look into his window; and as he handed her the basket and took her money, he made the remark that “it would make a very pretty Christmas-present.”

“Yes, sir, I think so,” replied Martha, as she turned away.

The little basket was much admired by the family at home. Tom was glad to see Martha so pleased. Mrs. Alson said that it was a handy thing for thread and needles, and Uncle Ben, who had accidentally overheard the after-breakfast conversation, turned it over in his hands, and told Martha he knew Miss Mason would be pleased.

So Martha had her wish, and said to Tom, laughing, “My Christmas has begun three days before.”

How busy those three days were! There were no regular lessons; but the scholars were kept practising their pieces and singing nearly all the time. The older boys were sent into the woods the day before Christmas, to gather greens to adorn the school-room, and the girls tied wreaths

and hung festoons of the fresh-smelling green. Miss Mason was arranging mottoes to be placed on the wall. Altogether, it was a happy time; and there was only one thing that troubled Martha. The girls were all talking of their new dresses and ribbons, and Martha knew that she had nothing but an old dress, which was whole, but rather the worse for wear; and Tom's jacket was even worse than her dress. The one troubled her as much as the other. She did not say any thing about it to any one; but she felt it.

She did not, however, let it mar the pleasure of those three days, any more than she could help; and the girls found her as cheerful and obliging as ever.

Late in the afternoon of the last day, the great tree was brought in and fastened up. Such an excitement as it created! Each one took a walk round it, and won-

dered how it would look when it was trimmed. They waited till the last bit of green was fastened and the last letter of every motto was placed.

“Peace on earth,” on one side of the room, and “Good will to men,” on the other; while over the desk were the words, “Happy greeting to all.”

“Now, remember,” said Miss Mason, as they prepared to go, “every one of you invite your parents and friends to-morrow afternoon, and be sure and be here in good season.”

It was late, and growing dark, when Martha came out of the school-room and began her homeward walk. Tom was with her; and they talked over the afternoon's work and the pleasure of the morrow.

“Such a happy Christmas as it will be!” said Martha, with sparkling eyes,—“almost

begun already! There is not a cloud in the sky: so we shall have a clear day; and then how beautiful the tree will look when it is trimmed! I wonder what you and I will get. There is to be a gift for every one. Oh, Tom!" And Martha gave a skip, and clapped her hands excitedly.

Tom laughed.

Presently, however, she grew quiet, and walked along silently at Tom's side.

He watched her a few minutes, and then asked her what she was thinking about.

"Do you see that bright star over yonder, Tom?" she said. "I was thinking of that other bright star the shepherds followed so long ago to find the Saviour. On this night, Christmas eve, you know it was."

"Yes," replied Tom; "and on this night the angels sang."

So they came home, and were welcomed there, not, as of old, with cross words and chidings, but with a smile from the mother, and a joyous shout from Jack, who ran to take Martha's hand; while Uncle Ben asked if they had all the trees they wanted, and how the room looked dressed in green.

"Father, you must come and see; and mother too," said Martha: "you are all invited to-morrow, and we want you very much to come. Don't we, Tom?"

"It will spoil half the pleasure if you do not," said Tom.

Mrs. Alson wiped the plate she held in her hand, more slowly, and looked towards Uncle Ben.

"So you want me to lose half a day's work, do you?" said he, trying to look stern.

"Yes, father: to-morrow we do."

"What does mother say?" said Uncle Ben, looking at her.

“I believe I should like to go to see the tree and hear them speak,” said she.


“Then I shall have to go,” he said, with a deep sigh, as though he did not wish it, and then, bursting into a hearty laugh, told the children he would not miss it for any thing.

“Me too ! me too !” urged Jack, taking hold of Martha’s hand.

Martha caught him up, and, dancing round the room with him, said,—

“Yes, Jack, you too ; and I should not wonder at all if you had a stick of candy before the day is over.”

CHAPTER VII.

HRISTMAS morning was as bright as the evening, before had promised; and Martha, who stood at the door in the early morning light, thought the air seemed even fresher than usual. There had been a heavy white-frost during the night, and the sun, just rising, sent his rays forward and made every thing sparkle—trees, houses, earth—on which his beams rested. Two or three children were coming from the spring with pails of water on their heads, and singing as they came.

Martha stood still, absorbed in enjoyment of the scene. Presently, however,

she heard a step behind her, and Tom stood at her side.

"A merry Christmas to you, Tom," she said, gayly; "and look out at the Christmas morning. Isn't it beautiful?"

Tom looked a few minutes, said, "Yes," soberly, and went out to chop his wood for the day.

Martha went back to her work; but she could not forget the beauty of the morning, and stopped, as she went to and fro, to look out at the door. Each time she did so, she noticed Tom at his work and observed his sober face. It troubled her so that, after she had finished what she had to do, she went out to where her brother was at work.

"Tom, I've come to scold you for being so sober this bright Christmas morning," she said, gayly, seating herself on a log near him. "What is the matter?"

He looked at her a moment, and then stopped cutting, and leaned on his axe.

“I do not know that it is any matter; but, Martha, do you know how my jacket looks that I am to wear this afternoon?”

Martha's face sobered a little: it could not sober much, this morning.

“I thought of that, Tom,” she answered, “some time ago, and was sorry; but I concluded it could not be helped, so it was best not to think about it.” She had almost forgotten her own dress, in her care for him.

He heaved a little sigh, and took up his axe.

“Is there not joy enough to-day,” said Martha, coaxingly, with her hand on his arm, “to make us forget these things?”

“You are a real little comforter,” said Tom, smiling in spite of himself.

And so Martha left him.

"People must eat breakfast, if it is Christmas morning," said Mrs. Alson, as she called them together.

Martha laughed, and said that, "after all, there was something in it which did not seem like every day."

And there really seemed to be a holiday air over every thing. Uncle Ben came in and took his seat in a way which said, plainly, that he had nothing to do.

"Ah, children!" said he, as the mother brought to the table a large corn-cake, yellow with eggs, "we have a Christmas-cake this morning, I see!"

"Well, I had the eggs: so I thought it would be no harm."

"Surely: any thing this morning," answered Ben.

Tom laughed, and asked Martha when she thought of taking her basket to Miss Mason.

“I have been studying about it,” answered Martha. “I would go this morning, but the children will be there, and they will keep her busy enough with their ‘Merry Christmas:’ so I thought I could run home for my basket after the exhibition is over, and take it round to the house where she lives, before dark.”

“I should think that would be a good plan,” said Tom, “if you do not forget your piece in thinking about it.”

“No danger of that. I’ve said it over too many times,” laughed Martha. “But I will get you to hear it again, after breakfast, and I will hear yours, so as to be sure.”

Accordingly, they recited to each other what was already perfectly learned, “so as to be sure,” as Martha said.

Just as they had finished, the father and mother came from the back of the room,

where they had been talking together, and, stopping by the fire, where Tom and Martha were, Uncle Ben said,—

“Tom and Martha, mother and I thought, as you were both to speak this afternoon, you would like to look smart; and as it is ‘merry Christmas,’ and as you have been such good, obedient children lately, your mother and I have tried to get you what we thought you would like best.” And he handed Tom a new jacket, and Mrs. Alson reached Martha a new blue wool-delaine dress, which, as she said, would “look pretty with her white apron.”

I need not tell you how glad they were. All of you who have received a Christmas-gift which you did not expect can imagine how pleasant it was to those two.

Martha fairly jumped, and Tom—sober Tom—proceeded immediately to put on his

jacket, and, marching up to Martha, asked her, laughing, "if she was not proud of her brother."

Martha looked at him a minute, and then answered, more soberly,—

"Yes,—very."

The mother and father stood by, enjoying the scene, feeling fully repaid for any sacrifice which they had been obliged to make, in seeing their children so happy.

Martha carried a very happy face when she made her appearance near noon, dressed for the exhibition. The new blue dress was very becoming; and the white apron, pressed as smooth as irons could make it, made a pretty contrast.

She came up to her mother, to show her dress; and as Mrs. Alson turned her round and round admiringly, Tom opened the door and came in. He smiled when he saw Martha, stopped and looked at her,

and then, giving a prolonged whistle, asked her if "she thought any one could beat her."

Martha laughed at him, and then said,—

"But, Tom, where have you been all the morning?"

"Into the woods, to get Miss Mason a present to go with yours."

"Into the woods!" said Martha, puzzled.

"Yes," he answered; "and see what I found." And from a basket which he carried, he drew a wreath formed of red berries and green leaves. It was exquisitely put together, firm in every part, and the delicious fragrance of the forest still hung about it.

"Oh, Tom! how sweet!" she said, springing towards him. "Who made it?"

"I did. Is it pretty?"

"Pretty! it's beautiful!" she said, touch-

ing with her finger the delicate green leaves and scarlet berries. "When are you going to give it to her?"

"Why, Martha, I want you to do it. It is just the size of your basket, and will look so pretty lying on the top. You can give it to Miss Mason."

"Oh, do not ask me to do it. You must present it yourself."

"Oh, Martha! I never could have the courage."

"I had much rather have you with me, Tom."

"No: I cannot, indeed. I had rather not," answered her brother.

It was in vain that Martha pleaded: he stood firm, and at last, taking the basket from the paper, he placed the wreath on the top and handed it to Martha.

"You must take it," said he; "and tell Miss Mason I wish her a merry Christ-

mas, and ask her to accept the little wreath from me.'

It was all that was needed to make the gift perfect in its way; and Martha could scarcely take her eyes away from it to eat her dinner. Indeed, no one ate much, although it was early, and full two hours before the exhibition would commence. Jack ate nothing at all; for, what with a certain tin horse which had come to him when the other presents were made, and a promise that he should go to the exhibition, he considered dinner of no account.

When Tom and Martha reached the school-room, it was filling fast with people. Martha's heart beat for the first time with fear, as she passed down between the seats filled with pupils and visitors, and took her seat on the platform, on each side of which were arranged benches for those who were to perform. It suddenly oc-

curred to her that she must stand up before all these people to speak and sing, and it frightened her.

In a few minutes, however, she felt calmer, and began to look about her. She recognized many school-mates and classmates among the crowd. Presently her eye fell upon Laura, who sat near her; and she smiled, but did not dare to speak; and then she singled out the rest of the singers. They were all in their places, looking very happy.

The grand Christmas-tree, which stood in the centre of the platform, was hidden by a curtain which swung to and fro before it. Martha had just turned from this to look again into the crowd below, when Miss Mason came up the steps of the platform.

She stopped at Martha's seat, and, bending down, said, "Merry Christmas, Martha."

Martha seized eagerly the hand held out to her, and answered, "Oh, Miss Mason, I am sure I wish you a great many!"

The teacher smiled, thanked her, and passed on. The room was fast filling with the parents and friends of the children. Sometimes, as she watched the great mass of people, Martha's heart almost failed her. Once, as she was feeling thus, she caught Tom's eye. He smiled, and motioned to her to look down towards the door. She turned, and saw her father and mother just coming in. Why should she fear? She had four persons in the house whom she wished to please,—her parents, her brother, and her teacher. For them she would do her best. So she became composed.

Soon it drew near the time to commence the exercises of the afternoon. Miss Mason rang the bell, and there was a hush of busy

voices, and all eyes were directed towards the platform. Miss Mason stepped forward and read the opening song. They all rose, and the glad voices poured forth a song of welcome. This was followed by a prayer by the superintendent, and a few remarks with regard to the progress of the school; and, after this was finished, the recitations commenced.

Martha watched eagerly, and with almost breathless interest, the manner in which her school-mates and class-mates performed their parts. As each one left the front of the platform, she felt that her turn was coming,—was almost here; and presently her name was called.

She stepped from her seat, and walked forward to the front. For a moment her heart failed her; but, catching her mother's eye, her courage returned, and when she spoke her voice was clear and firm.

THE CHILD ON THE JUDGMENT-SEAT.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE THREE WAKINGS."

Where hast been toiling all day, sweet-heart,
That thy brow is burden'd and sad?
The Master's work may make weary feet,
But it leaves the spirit glad.

Was thy garden nipp'd with the midnight frost,
Or scorch'd with the mid-day glare?
Were thy vines laid low, or thy lilies crush'd,
That thy face is so full of care?

"No pleasant garden-toils were mine!
I have sat on the judgment-seat,
Where the Master sits at eve and calls
The children around His feet."

How camest thou on the judgment-seat,
Sweet-heart? Who set thee there?
'Tis a lonely and lofty seat for thee,
And well might fill thee with care.

"I climb'd on the judgment-seat myself,
And have sat there alone all day;
For it grieved me to see the children around
Idling their life away.

"They wasted the Master's precious seed,
They wasted the precious hours;
They train'd not the vines, nor gather'd the fruits,
And they trampled the sweet, meek flowers."

And what hast thou done on the judgment-seat,
Sweet-heart? What didst thou there?
Would the idlers heed thy childish voice?
Did the garden mend by thy care?

“Nay, that grieved me more! I call’d and I cried,
But they left me there forlorn;
My voice was weak, and they heeded not,
Or they laugh’d my words to scorn.”

Ah, the judgment-seat was not for thee!
The servants were not thine!
And the eyes that adjudge the praise and the blame
See farther than thine, or mine.

The voice that shall sound there at eve, sweet-heart,
Will not raise its tones to be heard:
It will hush the earth, and hush the hearts,
And none will resist the word.

“Should I see the Master’s treasures lost,
The stores that should feed His poor,
And not lift my voice, be it weak as it may,
And not be grieved sore?”

Wait till the evening falls, sweet-heart,
Wait till the evening falls;
The Master is near, and knoweth all,—
Wait till the Master calls.

But how fared thy garden-plot, sweet-heart,
Whilst thou satest on the judgment-seat?

Who water'd thy roses and train'd thy vines,
And kept them from careless feet?

“Nay, that is saddest of all to me!
That is saddest of all!

My vines are trailing, my roses are parch'd,
My lilies droop and fall.”

Go back to thy garden-plot, sweet-heart,
Go back till the evening falls,
And bind thy lilies, and train thy vines,
Till for thee the Master calls.

Go make thy garden fair as thou canst;
Thou workest never alone:
Perchance he whose plot is next to thine
Will see it, and mend his own.

And the next may copy his, sweet-heart,
Till all grows fair and sweet;
And when the Master comes at eve,
Happy faces his coming will greet.

Then shall thy joy be full, sweet-heart,
In the garden so fair to see,
In the Master's words of praise for all,
In a look of his own for thee!

She finished, and, with beating heart,
returned to her place. She had done well:
—her teacher's eye, meeting hers for a

moment, told her that. She smoothed down her apron with a little sigh of relief, and waited for Tom's piece.

By-and-by he was called; and Martha felt proud of him as he took his place. The recitation was one of the finest of the afternoon. The declamation was one which required much expression; and it was rendered perfectly.

As he finished, and was about to step back, a gentleman stepped forward, put his hand on the boy's shoulder, and addressed the audience; and Martha's amazed eyes saw that it was their good doctor.

"This young lad has spoken well,—very well," said he; "and it so happens that I have had an opportunity of learning how he came to be so well prepared. Three weeks ago, just as he was preparing for this exhibition, he was taken ill. One of the most bitter thoughts that visited him

in his illness was the fear of being obliged to give up his part in the coming exhibition. His sister, perceiving this, obtained permission to teach him. So, day after day, she drilled him, obtaining directions from her teacher, from time to time, when in doubt or difficulty. I happened to be present, during my visits as physician, at many of the lessons; and I was always astonished, considering the difficulties under which they laboured, at the perseverance of the scholar and the patience of the teacher. You see the result. The sister is here this afternoon, and has taken part in the exercises. She is a noble sister, and her brother loves her for her kindness to him."

Martha listened with wide-open eyes. He was talking about her!—telling how she had taught Tom! She had not thought it any thing great. Her young companions

were all looking at her, and she felt confused for a moment; but, as Tom turned towards his seat, he gave her such a look of joy and pleasure that she cared not that they looked at her. Tom liked it; Tom was pleased.

I need not tell you of the rest,—only of that last song. All the scholars did well; for they all loved their teacher and were determined to please her. Just before the last song, Miss Mason stepped forward, and said that they had prepared some gifts for the scholars, which were hung upon the tree and would be distributed after the song, and that she would like each scholar, as his or her name was called, to come forward and take that which had been prepared.

The girls took their places for the song, and Laura, who stood at the head, commenced. Her clear, sweet voice was fol-

lowed by the others, and at the last by Martha.

Strong and clear, with every word perfectly distinct, her voice rang through the room. Every wandering eye was arrested and fastened on the singer, and each ear was caught and held by the perfect melody. To the last note her voice was firm; and in the chorus which followed—unconsciously to her—her clear voice rose above the rest, and was listened to with delight.

“Oh, Martha, how beautifully you sang!” whispered Laura, as they took their seats; “and I am so glad you were able to, after all.”

But now the curtain which hid the tree was drawn aside, and it stood revealed to them in all its beauty. It was hung with candles, all lighted, and surmounted by a large silver star, and the gifts were hung on the branches,—one for each child. At

the foot of the tree was a large pyramid of apples, surrounded by cakes.

As soon as the exclamations of delight had somewhat subsided, the superintendent, assisted by the teacher, began to distribute the gifts.

Martha's came to her in the shape of a pretty knit hood,—red, edged with white,—and a bag of candy. The cakes and apples came afterwards.

Laura had a very pretty box filled with candy; and Tom held up, for Martha to see, his gift,—a book, which he had long wanted to possess.

After the last hymn, and a few more words from the superintendent, the children separated from the school-room for their week's holiday.

Martha, as she left the platform, saw Miss Mason and the doctor talking with her father and mother. She came forward,

timidly. The doctor, however, turned immediately, and held out his hand to her.

“How did you like what I said about you, Martha?” said he, laughing.

“I hardly thought it worth telling, sir.”

“Your brother did.”

“I only did what I would have wished him to do for me,” she answered, turning the apple she held round and round between her fingers.

“That is the golden rule, though,” he said, as he released her hand. “May you ever abide by it!”

“Martha,” said Miss Mason, as she turned away, “if there is time before dark, will you come round to my house a few minutes?”

“Yes, ma’am,” answered Martha, wondering if Miss Mason knew that she had intended coming.

Miss Mason then bade them “good-

night," and she and the doctor went away together.

Martha walked along with her parents, listening to their praises of the exhibition and remarks concerning the various ones who had taken part.

"But no one could beat your voice, Marthy," said her father.

"No, indeed," replied the mother, "or her speaking, either,—except Tom."

So Martha's "cup was full." Could any thing more be added?

Yes, one thing more. Martha ran on before her parents the last part of the way, for it was nearly dark, and she must reach Miss Mason's before it was quite late.

She ran into the house, and was just seizing the basket, crowned with its bright wreath, when she caught sight of Tom coming in. She dropped her treasure and sprang towards him.

“ Oh, Tom ! ” she said, catching his hand ; and then, overcome, she burst into tears.

“ Why, Martha ! what is the matter ? ” said Tom, startled out of his usual calm.

The tears were gone almost as soon as they came, and, brushing them away, she said,—

“ Nothing, Tom. I’m only so glad and happy for you and all.”

Rather a confused speech ; but Tom understood it. He hesitated a moment, and then, stooping down, he kissed his sister, saying,—

“ Be glad, Martha. It’s all your doing.”

She gave his hand an answering pressure, and, seizing her basket, sprang away, the tears almost starting again.

One of her school-mates, who was a servant at the house where Miss Mason lived, opened the door for her, and, telling her she would call Miss Mason, left her in

the sitting-room, which was hung with Christmas-greens, and where a bright fire was burning in an open grate.

Martha went towards it, and stood warming her hands, as Miss Mason came in.

She left her place immediately, and was the first to speak.

“Miss Mason, Tom and I have felt your kindness to us all along, and we have tried to get for you a little Christmas-gift.” And she held it out. “The little basket, I thought, you might like for your sewing; and Tom would not come, but sent you the wreath, which he gathered this morning in the woods.”

Miss Mason took them, lifted the wreath from the basket, examined and admired both to Martha's fullest satisfaction. “I shall be proud of your basket,” she said; “for I've nothing but an old box in which

to keep my sewing-materials. And now, Martha," she said, as she placed the things on the table, "I've a word for you." She came back to the fire, and, taking Martha's hand in hers, said,—

"Do you know that you have brought me to-day a better gift than either of those on the table?"

Martha looked at her in surprise.

"I have been watching you all these weeks," she continued, "and seeing you try to overcome self and in honour prefer others. First you did this in order that you might give me the gift I asked you for,—an unselfish spirit; afterwards, because you loved God and wished to please him. I saw and noted the change, how you grew to giving up for others. I rejoiced then, but more than all when I heard of your effort to give me a gift, and that you gave it up cheerfully to care for



Martha's Gift.



"You have given me a precious gift."

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your brother, and of your love towards him. I have grown to love you very much, Martha; and I want you to take this little book as a gift from me. You will like it; for it tells of one, like yourself, who tried to live for others. God bless and care for you! you have given me a precious gift."

For a minute Martha could not answer, for the tears were flowing fast; but she managed to drive them back, and to thank Miss Mason in her own gentle, grateful way.

She must go home now; and as she opened the door Miss Mason said, "Tell Tom I thank him very much for the prettiest wreath I ever saw. I shall hang it over my mother's picture, which is the most precious thing I own."

Martha did not know how she went home; but she found herself there at last,

telling of her gift, and how pleased Miss Mason was with the basket and the wreath, delivering to Tom his teacher's message, which, by his smile in answer, she knew pleased him.

Supper was eaten, Martha hardly knew how, so full was she, and indeed all the family, with the afternoon's entertainment. By-and-by, however, she left them, and, wrapping her cloak about her, went out, as she loved to do, into the moonlight.

She still held the precious book in her hand. She turned over the leaves, letting the moonlight touch them. It was a pleasure just to look at it. Presently she saw, as the leaves left the cover, on the blank page at the front—something. By looking at it closely, she could read, by the moonbeams, her own name, with her teacher's, and, just below, the words,—

"In honour preferring one another."

Then Martha thought of the other gift she had given to Miss Mason. Oh, how God had helped her to grow unselfish and “in honour” to prefer others! She kneeled, and, speaking aloud, although she did not perceive it, thanked her heavenly Father for having thus far led her on; and then she asked for help, that her brother and herself might be able to please and love him always for her Saviour's sake; and then she heard Tom's voice reverently say, “Amen.”

“Martha, I am going to try,” said he, coming to her. “You have taught me to love God; and I am going to work for him.”

Martha's “cup ran over.”

“Oh, Tom,” she exclaimed, “let us never be satisfied until we feel sure that we have received that new heart without which we cannot please God nor be prepared

for heaven ! Miss Mason says that God will give us the Holy Spirit to help us, and make us feel that Christ died for us as much as he did for anybody in the world ! Is not that good to think of ?”

THE END.



